

A Round in the Ring

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A Round in the Ring

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Summary

Set after Weirdmageddon, Ford and Stan are both living in the Mystery Shack, helping the town pick up the leftover pieces. To prevent his brother from being too much of a sciencey hermit, Stan suggests they do some friendly sparring in the gym's new boxing ring.

“Aw, come on Sixer, please? For old time’s sake.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“What, you think I can’t take you on?”

Ford scoffed at that. “Please, Stanley, I have training from at least 12 different dimensions from 5 of the greatest fighters ever seen in the multiverse. I’d rather not - for your safety.”

Stan looked offended. “*What?* You think *I* can’t beat *you* in the boxing ring? Don’t make me laugh, Ford.” But it was too late. Stan was already huffing out ‘ha’s under his breath as he folded his arms, glaring at his brother. Ford, for his part, tightened the grip on his screwdriver before loosening it and rolling the tool between his fingers. He chewed his lip as he lifted his head from his latest project - just something he had started and was fiddling with to help him destress and unwind, but clearly his brother wasn’t going to have any of it. He clearly had a different preferred method for unwinding at the end of the day.

“Fine,” he sneered out. “If you really think you can still beat me after-” But he was cut off by a loud laugh and a firm clasp to the shoulder from Stan.

“Great! I knew you’d come around! Now hurry up and grab whatever you need.” Stan threw a dufflebag at him and he caught it, the breath whooshing out of him. He peeked inside and his eyebrows raised at the old familiar sight of the towels, shoes, wraps, and of course gloves. He glanced back up at Stan, eyebrow raised, but his brother just grinned.

“Meet me in the gift shop when you’re ready.”

And without another word, Stan left, climbing into the elevator and heading back up to the rest of the house. Ford just huffed out a laugh, shaking his head.

“Well this should be interesting,” he mumbled to himself, zipping the bag shut. “Very interesting indeed.”

Around a half an hour later, Ford somehow found himself in the middle of downtown Gravity Falls with Stan, both of them standing in front of the newly renovated gym. The entire town was still recovering from the literal Judgement Day that had happened just a few months ago and while the ordeal had practically flattened everything within a 5 mile radius, the locals were quick to bounce back after the danger was past. It was a huge community effort; the fact that nobody skipped town was tribute enough to how loyal they were to their remote little corner of the world. Initially only Stan was working on helping with the heavy lifting; initially, Ford had hidden for a whole week, crushed under his overwhelming guilt and subsequent depression. It was a huge effort, but Stan eventually worked his brother out of his hermit hole and forced him into the volunteer efforts. It ended up helping Ford out more than words or 11 different alien tongues could express; helping the town had brought back his

sense of purpose now that Bill was finally vanquished. Slowly but surely, he was opening up, relearning what it meant to be socially adventurous. Stan never said anything, but Ford could tell it was making him feel wonderful too and Ford couldn't help but share the sentiment. Reconnecting with his twin, while a bumpy start, was like a solid warmth in his chest. They fell into the same steps so easily, but so many awkward roadblocks still stood in the way for both of them. There were still so many words unsaid that hung in the air. They still had quite a few too many scars that needed picked at and reopened.

As Ford stared at the gym's entrance, he couldn't help but feel that this was going to be one of those times. Neither of them were going to walk out of this unscathed.

Frowning, Ford turned to look at his brother, who just gleefully grinned back. In high school, Stan was definitely the better boxer; it helped him get out frustrations about the girls who wouldn't date him, the good grades that never came, and the father who he could never impress. And Ford could tell he kept up with it - or at least, went back to it - those 30 years he was gone. The various punching bags around the house and in his room were evidence of that, if his arms and upper chest weren't enough of a dead giveaway. But as far as Ford knew, this was the first time the Gravity Falls Gym had a boxing ring among its other features. Leave it to Stan to be the one to break it in.

"So, you ready for this?" Stan said, leading the way in and heading towards the weight room.

"I am hyper-vigilant to the point of paranoia, Stan. I think I'm ready for a friendly boxing match," he said, bag flung over his shoulder as he followed his twin into the building. The gym itself was considerably warmer than the chilly bite of autumn. Luckily, the had only been open for a few days so that tell-tale smell of sweat and testosterone didn't cling to every surface just yet. Even so, Ford was thankful that Stan had the foresight to provide them with their own equipment.

They wove their way through the weights, moving to a back section of the room full of punching bags, stand-ups, padded walls, and - of course - a mid-sized ring in the center of it all. They had come in at the end of the day, so they had the entire building pretty much to themselves. Though the gym had opened, most of Gravity Falls didn't yet have time for recreational exercise; Stan was only here because he was just that eager to try out the new gear. His excitement only grew as they entered the room, a low whistle escaping him.

"Isn't this great? It's all pretty good stuff too! Not state-of-the-art, but pretty good. Sturdy; can take a beating. Can't ask for more'n that." For emphasis, he patted a nearby hanging sandbag with the flat of his hand, happy with the sound it gave off. Ford just looked around, eyebrow raised.

"I'm guessing there's a changing room around here somewhere?"

"What, can't strip in front of your own twin?" Stan teased, and Ford flashed him a look. His grin had turned mischievous and Ford could feel the flush creeping up. *That* particular part of their relationship was still on the fence; while Stan was getting more adventurous, Ford had been getting more flighty and timid. The constant teasing and provocations didn't help, especially now. Ford grumbled out a noncommittal reply as Stan rolled his eyes, pointing towards a vague direction in the back.

“Down the hall and to the left, all for your privacy. Should be a locker room in there.” Ford’s eyebrow raised.

“And what about you?”

“What, like anyone will see me? I’ll just change here and wait for you.” For added emphasis, Stan dropped his bag on the floor of the ring, unzipping it and rummaging around. Ford watched him for a minute before Stan raised an eyebrow at him, flashing another grin and throwing a wink. “I’m not gonna wait for you to leave either, so if you want a show you’re more than welcome to stick around.” That clearly crossed Ford’s limit; he huffed angrily and stalked off, the sound of his brother’s laugh following him into the locker room.

He dropped his bag on a bench unceremoniously, removing his coat and trying not to overthink what his brother just said. Honestly, he’d be lying if he hadn’t thought about it. Hell, when his brother first got him back, the first thing he had done was catch Stan’s sly pass at him, had checked his brother out, but completely changed tune as soon as the children were made known to him. After that, he had done his utmost to avoid his brother because if just the sight of him was enough to bring back heated memories still, well, that was best left pushed to the side, buried under a need to stop Bill, stop the inevitable apocalypse. Plus, the kids were there and how many social taboo lines would *that* cross that they didn’t need to be exposed to and...

He threw his turtleneck off and shucked off the rest of his clothes as fast as possible, trying to calm his overworked mind. He always overthought everything - always. And his brother... hell from the moment he walked out of that goddamn portal he could tell how Stan felt about it, the world and the kids and the universe be damned. He could still see it bubbling under that angry face Stan had given Ford every time they crossed paths and Ford could tell how much he wanted to confront him about it. But Ford always ran away, always convinced himself the end of the world mattered more than his relationships, because if he couldn’t stop it there was no relationship to even think about. But now that it was all past, now that they had been together under the same roof for 2 months, and there was only so much running Ford could still do. At this point, he wasn’t even sure what he was still running from - his brother? His own feelings? The fear of being seen as weak or worse - *illogical*? Because that’s what all this was, completely and irrevocably illogical and inconceivable and any sane person wouldn’t be daydreaming of walking up behind their brother, kissing his neck gently, reveling in the feel of him laughing under their lips, of their brother tracing the outline their 6 fingers and just falling into that intimate feeling before turning and kissing him and memorizing his lines and scars and...

“Stop it,” Ford chastised out loud, halting his train of thought before it could continue. Instead, he did what he always did; threw up his walls, drowned it out with his logic – the logic that said even if he had seen it work for others in other dimensions, this was *his* dimension and those sorts of things certainly didn’t fly so well here. He had to adhere to that. So instead he busied himself with his hands wrappings, getting himself lost in remembering and recording the twists and turns he needed to make to wrap them properly. He always had to improvise for his 6th finger and it had been so long he had nearly forgotten, but as he weaved the tape between his digits it came back quickly. Soon his hands were sturdy and padded, ensuring no broken knuckles or bones. The repetitive motions had calmed his nerves

and he was feeling lighter and clearer - a good mindset to have right before a match. Finally, he swapped out his glasses for his athletic eyewear and went back out to the boxing ring.

Stan was leaning on the wires, staring listlessly at the ceiling, when Ford finally came out to greet him. Ford stilled and felt his brain go haywire once more before he set it back onto the 'sharp clarity' setting. He hadn't been prepared for Stan's bare chest in the fight; like Ford, he figured he'd at least have a tanktop on, but Stan was never the shy type, and it was almost too much, seeing him leaning languidly, waiting on Ford.

That feeling was shut off quickly though when Stan moved his head, saw him, and then burst out laughing.

Ford would have fully closed his fist at that if he could. He squinted at his brother, unsure of the source of his ridicule. "What?" he asked, but Stan just shook his head, pointing at him and laughing harder. "*What?!?*" he asked again, a little more desperately, just to get his brother to stop laughing.

"Oh my god, Ford, are you kidding me? You'll wrestle the goddamn *Devil*, you'll start and end the apocalypse, you'll travel through HOW many dimensions, and brag about HOW many feats you've accomplished... and yet you can't enter a boxing ring with me without wearing *safety goggles?*" He broke down into hysterics again, barely getting the last words out. Ford pursed his lips in agitation. As usual, Stan missed the point entirely.

"It's safety protocol, Stan. Besides, I don't want my glasses cracked any more than they already are, I don't have time yet to get the prescription changed and -"

Stan just laughed harder, blowing the air out roughly between his lips. Ford flushed in angry embarrassment. "Oh, yeah, you -" he gestured to the whole of him " - '*Mr. Give-kids-weapons-make-deals-with-demons*'; yeah you are totally the face of safety and athletic precaution. What's your slogan? 'Top Nerd's Top Choice!'" He snorted into his hand at his own joke.

Ford, deciding that enough was enough, pushed his gloves down on over his hands, tying them up and tugging them into the perfect fit. "Alright knucklehead, had your laugh? Because I decided to see just how many knuckles I can put into that skull of yours." At this, Stan did cease his laughter, wiping a tear from his eye as he straightened back up from his doubled-over position. Instead, his smile grew large and toothy as he slipped his own gloves on.

"You're on, Poindexter. And don't think you have an advantage just because you have two more knuckles than I do. I've learned some new tricks over the years."

Ford said nothing, instead opting to clench his jaw and focus his mind. In a way, he was glad Stan had riled him up before this fight; now he would have some physical action to channel his anger into and if that anger ended up embedded in his brother's side well... he couldn't deny that Stan had it coming.

They both bent under the ropes and entered the ring - Stan with a smile and Ford with a frown. It wasn't full-sized, being only a practice ring, so neither of them had much space to

outmaneuver the other. Ford committed this disadvantage to memory as he brought his arms up into the traditional boxing stance. He shot a venomous glare at Stan through his gloves and Stan just grinned smugly back. Stan's confidence just riled Ford up even more, and instead of dancing around the center, he decided to strike first, throwing a few fast jabs right for Stan's head.

Stan blocked them easily, as he expected. But Ford was just testing him, just letting out a little bit of what he had bottled up for his brother, all the teasing he had endured these last 9 weeks, the constant back-and forth and now Ford *really* wanted to wail on him, get it all out once and for all.

He threw a few more jabs, trying for a left hook, but Stan just blocked it all, flowing around his brother's blows. Ford had forgotten just how good Stan was at taking hits and he tried for a different angle, a different approach. Instead, Stan just blocked and ducked, keeping his head easily out of striking range. Ford grit his teeth angrily, tired of striking out every time. He threw a wide uppercut, trying to get Stan from below, trying to land *anything* on his perfectly protected brother –

Stan just backed up, letting his swing travel wide. Ford blinked and stumbled, off-balance. The next thing he knew Stan had sidestepped out of his visual range and he felt a gentle tug on the back of his head - right under the band of his athletic goggles. He caught his footing just as his eyewear slid off and he groped helplessly.

"Hey! Stanley!" He spun around, growling in anger as his brother just stepped out of range once again, grinning like an idiot. As he stepped away he came into better focus, but not well enough. "For the love of crackers, Stan, are you really cheating right now?!" The curse replacement slipped out unbidden and Stan barked out a laugh, twirling his goggles on a finger.

"More like evening out the playing field here, Sixer," he said mildly, hands on his hips. Now you gotta box like *I* box, and there's a lot of improv when I box." Ford fought the instinct to rub his eyes, blinking as he tried to find his focus. It didn't help that both he and his brother were far-sighted, and boxing was a close-quarters sport.

"How the *hell* did you ever fight anyone like this?" Ford whined out as he brought up his defensive stance again. Stan just shrugged, tossing Ford's eyewear out of the ring before bringing his own arms up.

"If you think this is bad, just wait until your eyebrow gets cut open." The nonchalant line was followed up with a swift jab that Ford barely had time to block. The force of it caused him to stagger; it was clear that even with age, Stan's wasn't lacking one bit in the upper body strength department. He didn't have much time to process this information any further before another jab rained down onto his gloves, and another. Now that Ford had lost a good chunk of his sight, his brother had switch to the offensive, hoping to overwhelm him into submission.

But Ford wasn't that easily beaten. If he couldn't fight without his glasses, he would have been dead years ago. Instead he focused on the pattern of Stan's punches, where they fell, waiting for his opening, waiting for him to tire, feeling each impact all the way down to his

toes. Once he felt a stutter, he broke his position, stepping forward with a swift left hook. He glimpsed Stan's blurred look of shock as the punch connected solidly into his cheek, knocking him back a few steps.

"Hah!" Ford proclaimed as Stan took a second to wipe his jaw. "You thought you could outwit me by removing my glasses? You're going to have to do better than that." Ford's high came down slowly as Stan just stood there, rubbing his jaw, looking Ford up and down studiously. Under the gaze, Ford's self-consciousness crept him and his smile faded.

"It's cute that you think I'm trying," Stan muttered out, and Ford snapped back into stance, jaw clenching. Stan leisurely followed, a little grin creeping across his face.

"I don't think you're trying, I *know* you are," Ford stated, throwing another punch, putting more force behind it than his previous blows. Stan felt it as he absorbed the blow with his block, watching Ford through pursed lips. Ford didn't stop there. "You've been trying to play the mental game on me for *weeks*, but I'm not going to break, Stanley."

"Well, I know that between us, I'm not the one with the glass jaw," Stan muttered out, and Ford growled, falling for the taunt. He swung hard and fast but Stan just caught the blow again. Ford, left wide open, got to eat his first punch - right to the side of the ribs. He winced but didn't back off, countering Stan and landing a jab to the arm. He huffed; not a good punch, he would have to do better.

"That's fine by me; the more hits you take, the more times my knuckles will work into that thick, annoying skull of yours," Ford growled out. He threw a punch at Stan's head but Stan just blocked him again, grunting from the force of it.

"Someone's sounding testy," Stan managed out, bringing his arms back up and throwing a few more fast jabs at Ford. Ford did his best to block; one snuck in and clipped his temple. The pain burst behind his eyes and his ears rung a bit from the punch. Ford just took a step back, throwing his arms up, grumbling all the way.

"Oh, and I don't have a good reason to sound testy? When I have *you* trying to dig at me every time you see me?" He swung at Stan again, who barely brought his arm up in time for a block. He connected with his forearm; the glove left a scratch and Stan hissed from the contact.

"Not my fault you're the world's biggest hermit who will hardly look at me most days." Stan threw his arms up defensively, making himself a solid wall to Ford's blows. "I mean, can you blame a guy for trying to get you out, doing things? Lordy Fordy, at least you looked *happy* for once, instead of being a scowling insensitive -" Ford cut him off with an uppercut that came up from below, landing cleanly with Stan's chin. His teeth clacked and Ford let out a breath in approval, but he didn't let himself stop there.

"Maybe I would actually *try* and make conversation if you weren't *always* there with some ridiculous quirk, some stupid *thing* that I have *no interest in* -" He threw blow after blow, causing Stan to back up, throwing his arms up in a defensive posture, pushing into the ring's ropes. "- Of course I'm going to be testy! I have to deal with an annoying *wart* of an old man who tries to - to -" His throws stalled for a moment as he beat into his brother. He didn't care

if they actually made contact anymore, didn't care if he was devolving into a fit. He panted through each punch, the sweat dripping from his hair and face. " – God Stan, why do you *have* to – you don't *need* to – *URGH!*"

He threw all his effort into that last punch and it landed square into Stan's forearm. The previous cut Ford had put on him split open, bleeding freely, but Stan barely reacted. Ford leaned into the punch, panting, hunched over, trying to control himself.

"It's not your job to make me feel better, Stan, so why do you make it your job? Why can't you just... leave it all well enough alone?"

Stan was silent as Ford stood there, bent over, a panting, sweaty, wrecked mess of the man he was just a half an hour ago. Ford felt Stan straighten up and he closed his eyes, feeling them burning unpleasantly in their sockets. He felt a pressure on his hand; he realized belatedly that he had left his punch on Stan's arm. Now, Stan gingerly held his gloved hand, cradling it awkwardly between his own.

"Come on, Sixer. You're too smart for a stupid-ass question like that," He grumbled out. He tugged on Ford's hand, encouraging him to stand up straight. Ford closed his eyes, debating the action for a moment before following the tug back up. When he next saw Stan's face, there was no laughter, no smug scowl to greet him. Instead, it was a firm dedication, despite the slight swelling to the right side and the split lip. Ford immediately regretted the damage done, but he knew he couldn't have fared much better if the sting above his left eye was any indication. Under Stan's steady gaze, he swallowed and looked away.

"You- you shouldn't, Stan. I shouldn't - *we* shouldn't - Lord, we're different people now, we've had 30 years apart, 40 if you count before that, and everything is different now and -"

"Ford." He bit his lip and glanced back at Stan. The frown that greeted him instantly made his stomach drop. "We ended the apocalypse together."

"Yes but-"

The frown deepened. "We finished off a dream demon together."

"That has nothing to do with -"

He took a step toward Ford. Ford responded by retreating a step back.

"Our lives were saved for two kids who wanted nothing more than to see us make up."

He could feel the panic rising in his throat.

"Okay but you and I both know that their feelings should *not* be taken into account here—"

"I worked 30 years to get you back, Stanford."

Stan was close now. Ford could see every bead of sweat, every pore, every beautiful line and contour. Those sharp eyes glared at him and a pathetic sound fought to escape his throat.

Ford's heart hammered in his chest and he swallowed, biting his lip. His eyes closed as he tried, once again, to seal himself off. He had perfected it in the last 30 years, he couldn't let it crumble now.

"Ford, please. Look at me."

Ford did as he was asked and immediately wished he hadn't. Because Stan's face was so contorted, his eyes swimming, his mouth snarling. A blurred mess of it all greeted him and Ford couldn't take it.

His arm shot up - a pathetic last-ditch attempt at a punch - but Stan just caught it, head shaking.

"Why are you still trying to *fight* me?"

Because you suffocate me. His throat choked on the words that desperately begged to be screamed out of him. *Because you leave me dizzy and breathless and you leave my brain a fuzzy mess with just a look, a smile, a touch. Because I can't be close to someone who can leave me so defenseless, so weak, so vulnerable, and I can't because it's not safe for either of us and we both deserve better than this, Stan, you horrible, wonderful, undescrivable human being -*

And he shuddered and shook as the tears came unbidden. He yanked his arm from Stan's grasp as Stan searched his gaze, looking for an answer, some kind of understanding - and then Ford was fumbling with his gloves, angrily pulling them off and tossing them to the floor. Stan just stood there, arms out helplessly as Ford broke down in front of him, as he watched his brother lose it completely. Ford tore and yanked at his tape, leaving marks on his arms and knuckles and fingers but he didn't care he just had to get them off *right now* or he might just fall apart completely.

But it was Stan's touch that caused him to unravel faster than his tape and he jerked into it, grabbing Stan's hand before he could pull away. And in his emotional fury Ford could only growl as he pulled Stan to him, his brother's worried face swimming into view.

"Ford, what on Earth are you—" was all he could get out before Ford's lips were crushing into his, his half-wrapped and ragged hands gripping Stan's face tight on each side. He didn't wait for Stan's reaction before he was kissing him again, breathing in his brother's scent, the smell of sweat and old aftershave and the wood of the shack clinging to him like a shirt. He hardly registered his heated, choked sobs as Stan stiffened in response to his assault, this blow being the one that most easily brought him to a standstill. Then, amongst the salty sting of his own tears there was the flavor of lips and blood and a soft, returning wetness as Stan kissed him back - tentatively at first, but with more force as each of them fought for dominance. Ford choked and coughed out a happy sound - stuck somewhere between a laugh and a cry - as the heat flooded his chest in a way he hadn't felt in - *Lord* - literally a lifetime. He pulled away from their locked lips, catching his breath and resting his forehead on Stan's and now it was Stan's turn to fumble with his gloves, to wiggle his hands out of their confinements and then they were on Ford's arms, gripping him tight, the handle on him rough with the wrappings still in place. Stan let out an earthy groan that sent shivers down Ford's spine, lighting him up like a firework.

“God Ford, you really are fucked up,” he said gruffly, his body closing any gaps that still remained between them. Ford whined a bit at that and found Stan’s lips again, grappling his tongue with his twin, tasting him, pulling him in, the fire in his veins pounding in his ears as his insides feel as if they’re about to explode.

“Only because you get me this fucked up,” Ford mumbled out at his next chance for a breath before plunging back in, the hot wetness between their lips something he is loathe to disconnect. He hears Stan groan and twist into him and he just feels on fire, hands roaming, the last 9 weeks just being the tip of the iceberg that was 30 years *without Stan* and Lord, does he hate himself but Hell if he doesn’t love Stan just as much and –

Stan puts an arm on his, stilling Ford’s relentless attack to his face and pulling their lips apart with a wet *smack*. Ford blinks and straightens, the loss of contact a startling revelation and he looks at Stan, eyes wide. Stan just smiles softly back into Ford’s shocked face, a small chuckle escaping him.

“Woah, hey, Sixer, slow down, ya can’t fuck me in the boxing ring,” Stan rumbled out, “though it is an interesting proposition.” His voice was like gravel and each note sent a new wave of pleasure straight through him. Ford shook his head and frowned.

“Wha-what? Stan -” He was cut off of his rambling reply by an embrace from Stan. It wasn’t their first hug since he had gotten back, but it felt like the first truly genuine hug between them. Affection swelled in his chest and behind his eyes and he coughed to try and keep it contained. He clung to Stan as Stan’s hand wove small circles on his back, calming him. When he next spoke, his voice was tinged with a soft warmth.

“Hey, hey, calm down. I..I thought this would finally get you to talk out your tension but I didn’t expect - *whew*.” Ford rested his head on Stan’s shoulder, his breathing getting more even as his brother soothed him back down from his hysteria. It was a wonderful thing, letting Stan take care of him like this, and God if he didn’t want to start crying again just because he had been such a fool to deny himself this for such a long time.

“I just... I am - *was*? - convinced that my feelings for you held me back. 40 years I bottled them, told myself I could bury them, if I was just logical enough, just smart enough...” He dropped his head again, unable to continue. “Such an idiot,” he mumbled out, shaking his head. Stan finally broke the hug at that though, straightening Ford out and patting his arm. Ford looked at him and Stan grinned.

“Yeah, good to know that you can finally admit that you really are a Grade A asshole, that’s some serious progress for you, Sixer.” Stan’s eyes flicked around them for a second and his smile took on a more bemused expression. “But as much as I’d love discussing all that, I have a feeling we should maybe move it elsewhere.”

Ford blinked blearily at that, his brow knitting together as his senses came back. Then he remembered where they were – the boxing ring, in downtown Gravity Falls, in plain sight of anyone who just happened to wander in or walk by. He swallowed thickly and nodded.

“Yes, yes I-” he cleared his throat, the heat rising to his cheeks. Even if nobody had caught them today, just the thought of being discovered making out with his twin was enough to

bring him back to full awareness. “I agree. This would be more proper with some privacy. Then we can, *ah-*” He unwrapped his hands the rest of the way, busying himself with rerolling the tape and fabric.

“-We can *work out* any remaining issues. As well as get cleaned up a bit.”

Stan looked at him and then flashed a grin, Ford’s double entendre not lost to him. The smile caused his own lips to twitch and his stomach to flip. It was still the same response, he knew - that infamous, terrified excitement of the fight-or-flight response. Except this time, Ford was choosing not to run away. Only time would tell if they could even make this work but...

“Sure thing, Sixer. Come on, let’s get changed.”

Stan threw an arm around Ford’s shoulders, and Ford leaned into the welcomed contact.

We’ve got a lot of catching up to do.”

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